

I am a cosponsor of legislation that would begin to fix this bill. It would enable seniors and disabled Medicare enrollees to bypass the private insurance market, to say, no, I don't want to compare 30 or 40 different insurance plans and 30 or 40 different insurance company brochures, and talk to 30 or 40 different insurance agents. I want to bypass the private insurance market, check a box, and simply add a prescription drug benefit to my Medicare. I get to choose my doctor as a Medicare beneficiary, I get to choose the hospital, I ought to be able to choose my drug formulary.

It would also authorize Medicare to negotiate bulk discounts on prescription drugs. That is the way the Veterans' Administration does it. That is the way most countries in the world do it. That is why drug prices are a third or a fourth or a fifth in every other country in the world, much, much lower prices than there are in the United States.

In other words, this legislation, this new law as we propose the changes, would give seniors and taxpayers a break. Perhaps Secretary Leavitt will make use of his Ohio trip to announce the administration's support for these bills. Perhaps.

May 15 is the cutoff for Medicare beneficiaries to enroll in the new prescription drug program. If they enroll after that date, believe it or not, they have to pay a penalty for late enrollment. Let's think about that. My Republican colleagues in Congress and the Bush administration have finally acknowledged that the drug program got off to a rocky start and is very confusing to seniors. Seniors have sat on the phone for up to 2 hours waiting for someone from the Medicare hotline to help with enrollment questions.

I talked to seniors in Vandalia, Ohio, in Cincinnati, in Norton, and in London, Ohio. All of them say this Medicare drug benefit is way too confusing. Not just prospective enrollees are confused, but State agencies, local service agencies, Federal bureaucrats, even the insurers who offer the new coverage. Finding the right answer to an enrollment question is almost as difficult as choosing which of the 30 or 40 plans to enroll in.

And when seniors did enroll in a plan, there were paperwork problems, there were systems problems, there were transition problems, there were formulary problems, and there were problems in the drugstores where one pharmacist at least, one pharmacy in London, Ohio, had to close because of the additional cost imposed on these small businesses by this bureaucracy created by a Congress that listened to the drug industry and the HMOs more than it listened to drugstores, to pharmacists or to seniors.

The various failings of this drug program made the news virtually every day for 4 months. Maybe Secretary Leavitt will make use of his trip to Ohio to announce the Republican lead-

ership is listening, they have changed their minds, and they want to see a better law. Maybe.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. CUMMINGS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed a Joint Resolution and a Concurrent Resolution of the following titles in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S.J. Res. 28. Joint resolution approving the location of the commemorative work in the District of Columbia honoring former President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

S. Con. Res. 60. Concurrent resolution designating the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, as America's National Negro Leagues Baseball Museum.

BLUE DOG COALITION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. ROSS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, this evening, as every Tuesday evening, the members of the 37-Member strong fiscally conservative Democratic Blue Dog Coalition come to the floor of the United States House of Representatives, here at our Nation's Capitol, to address the debt, the deficit, and tonight also the budget.

And for those of you who have walked the halls of Congress, it is easy to spot when you are walking by a Member's office that is a member of the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition because you will see one of these posters, one of these posters that displays the current national debt. And every American citizen shares the National debt.

As you can see, at the moment, the U.S. national debt is \$3,378,143,406,405 and some change. And for every man, woman, and child in America, including those being born this hour, your share of the national debt is \$28,000.

We raise these issues for a number of reasons, Mr. Speaker. It is hard now to remember, but from 1998 to 2001, our Nation enjoyed a balanced budget. We had a surplus. We could meet many of America's priorities. But today, for the sixth year in a row, we have the largest budget deficit ever in our Nation's history. Our Nation is borrowing a billion dollars a day. We are sending \$279 million a day to Iraq, \$57 million a day to Afghanistan, a billion a day we are borrowing, and on top of that we are spending half a billion dollars a day simply paying interest, not principal but just interest on the debt that we already have.

As members of the Blue Dog Coalition, we believe it is time to get our Nation's fiscal house in order. Now, the Republicans in this year's budget they will present this week on the floor of the United States House of Representatives indicates that their priorities do not reflect our priorities or our values. We are going to spend a lot of the time this evening talking about that.

They will say, well, we are trying to balance the budget, which they do not do. They will say that, well, we are cutting this program or that program to try and reduce the deficit. But what they do not tell you is that their budget includes \$1.7 trillion over the next 10 years in tax cuts that primarily benefit those earning over \$400,000 a year.

So when they talk about cutting programs, they will tell you that they are trying to cut programs to reduce these numbers. Not so. Because you don't cut taxes for folks earning over \$400,000 a year at a time when you are in a nation that is borrowing a billion dollars a day; at a time when you are in a nation that is spending half a billion a day simply paying interest on the debt you already have.

So it is about priorities. And the Republican priorities in this year's budget include cuts to the Dale Bumpers Small Farms Research Center in my Congressional District. In fact, there are 25 or 26 agricultural research centers all over America that are being cut. They create good paying jobs in these rural communities that invest in the kind of agricultural research that our farm families so desperately need.

The development of the Dale Bumpers Small Farms Research Center began back in 1977 with their initial work starting in 1980. It is a partnership among three agencies, Agricultural Research Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.

Their mission, the mission at the Agricultural Research Service unit at the Dale Bumpers Small Farms Research Center, is to develop scientific principles and technologies to enhance the profitability and sustainability of small-scale farms, because they are threatened by a lack of profitability. Yet in this year's budget, in this year's budget that the President submitted to this Congress and that this Republican Congress may very well pass this week, it includes zeroing out, eliminating 25 or 26 of these agricultural research centers all across America.

Again, this budget is about priorities, and this budget that we are going to vote on this week does not reflect my priorities or my values. It certainly does not represent the kind of conservative small-town values that I was raised on, where I was raised to value our farm families who simply try to do their best to provide us with a safe and reliable source for food and fiber.

We can get into a debate about how we have become too dependent on foreign oil. If we are not too careful, we

are going to become too dependent on other countries for our food and fiber. And I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that that is a dangerous road to go down, and one in which America has no business going down.

This is just one example of many of what is wrong with this budget. There are ways to balance the budget, and we are going to talk tonight about an alternative that I believe makes sense, that reinstates a thing called PAYGO. Pay as you go rules mean if you want to fund a new program, you have to cut something else. If you want to pass a tax cut, you have to cut a program. You just don't go borrow more money from China to fund it. It also balances the budget within, I believe, 10 years.

Yes, in 10 years we would have a balanced budget again, and that is an alternative that will be presented on the floor this week that many of us will be supporting.

We will be talking a lot tonight about the debt, the budget, and the deficit and these things, and I am very honored to be joined tonight by a number of my Blue Dog friends, and DENNIS CARDOZA is the co-chair of the Blue Dog Coalition. He is the co-chair for communications. He is a Member of Congress from California. A lot of people, when they think of fiscally conservative Democrats, they think we are just in the South, but we are spread from California to Long Island. This is a national movement. This is a national movement of 37 fiscally conservatives Democrats that believe it is time to restore some common sense and fiscal discipline to our Nation's government.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to turn this thing over to one of the leaders of our group, DENNIS CARDOZA from California.

Mr. CARDOZA. Well, I want to thank the gentleman from Arkansas both for relinquishing of some time and also for the leadership that he has shown by hosting this hour for the Blue Dog Democrats each Tuesday night this year.

Before I get started in my prepared remarks, I wanted to just acknowledge something that came to mind. The previous presiding officer, the gentleman that was acting as Speaker a few moments ago, is my former colleague from the legislature in California, a wonderful man, JOHN CAMPBELL. And it struck me that when we were in the legislature together in California, every year we had to balance the budget. We could not leave Sacramento, we had to stay in session until we had a balanced budget. It is so unfortunate that here in Washington, as we have both graduated up the ladder, that we don't have that same kind of fiscal accountability and the same responsibility.

And sitting here with my colleague, JIM COSTA, who used to be one of the leaders in the California State Senate, we took it very seriously. In fact, it was mandated in law that every year,

and I believe almost every State in the country has to do that, but here in Washington, in our Nation's Capital, we cannot find the fiscal responsibility to balance our Nation's budget and get our fiscal house in order.

□ 2045

The Blue Dog Coalition has made repeated calls for responsible budget reforms that will put our country back on this path of fiscal responsibility and fiscal sanity that I have discussed.

As moderates and as fiscal hawks, we have tried to reach across the aisle to engage in real debate on fiscal responsibility. For years now, our appeals for commonsense, bipartisan reforms have been brushed aside by both the White House and this Republican leadership.

Instead, this Republican Congress and the White House have pursued policies that have resulted in exploding deficits and over \$8 trillion in debt. Rather than taking this fiscal mess seriously and putting forward a plan to change course, we are being fed more of the same in this year's budget. The Republican budget resolution is a rehashed version of misguided policies that have gotten us into this mess in the first place. It is said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and over yet expecting different results. That is exactly how I feel about the Republican leadership's fiscal policies. No matter how deep they dig this fiscal hole, they want to keep shoveling, they want to keep digging; and we have to make it stop.

The administration has requested and Congress has provided for four increases in the debt ceiling since 2001. This budget resolution does not fix the broken budget; it actually makes it worse. The Budget Committee passed a budget resolution that includes a deficit of \$372 billion for the fiscal year 2006 and a deficit of \$348 for 2007. This means that under this Congress and this White House, Republicans totally, we will have seen the five biggest budget deficits in American history in 5 consecutive years. Under this budget, the statutory debt by 2011 will go up another \$2.3 trillion, leaving the statutory debt at a record level of \$11.3 trillion. Ladies and gentlemen, this is unacceptable.

The Blue Dog Coalition has put forth a comprehensive 12-step plan that is designed to cure our Nation's addiction to deficit spending. Our proposal will include commonsense measures such as reinstating the pay-as-you-go rules such as what you use to balance your own budget at home. Every American understands that they need to balance their own checkbook; so does America. These pay-as-you-go rules are the first step.

In the 1990s with PAYGO rules on the books, we saw deficits disappear. We had record surpluses and rapid economic growth. In 2001, the Republican-controlled Congress abandoned PAYGO, and we have been awash in red

ink ever since. It is time for Congress to bring back PAYGO and bring back some fiscal sanity for our country.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. ROSS for having us here tonight and thank him for his leadership.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the co-chair, Mr. CARDOZA, and for communications within the 37-Member strong, fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition for his insightful information and knowledge about the process and what we are trying to accomplish. We have Members here from Georgia and Illinois and Oklahoma and from all over the Nation that have come to speak the truth, to hold this Republican Congress accountable and demand some commonsense and fiscal discipline be restored to our Nation's government.

We are going to hear from people other than California, but it just so happens our first two presenters are both from California. The other is a gentleman who has not been here long, but has been quite effective within our coalition and a real leader within our coalition, and that is the gentleman from California (Mr. COSTA).

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Speaker, I rise to add my voice to my fellow Blue Dog Coalition members who are here this evening to have a dose of fiscal sanity, to allow the American people to understand that there is indeed another choice. Therefore, tonight we hope to give an accurate picture on the budget process that we are about to embark on this week and the lack of fiscal integrity that this budget process unfortunately has, because it lacks a bipartisan effort to provide the sort of financial support that the American public demands.

I too want to commend Mr. ROSS and Mr. CARDOZA for allowing me to join with them in this effort. I think that Blue Dogs who are fiscally conservative really reflect the mainstream of what America is all about.

The fact of the matter is that this budget resolution that we will debate this week has in its very basic underpinnings a lack of fiscal integrity. Let me talk about a dirty little secret contained in this budget resolution that all Members ought to be aware of. The secret is the offloading of our Federal financial problems onto our States as a strategy to reduce our Nation's budget deficit.

The hypocrisy is clear, through the preemption of State laws, and in spite of a little-used Federal law that prevents unfunded mandates on States, Congress has arrogantly chosen to do just that, and that is to offload on our States.

Do the States have the ability to fill that gap? Well, the National Council of State Legislatures has identified the minimum gap in Federal funding to States caused by unfunded mandates in 2004 fiscal year as being approximately \$25.6 billion. In the fiscal year 2005, the amount rose to \$26.2 billion.

Evidence by the National Council of State Legislatures shows that this gap

will continue over the next decade and could grow as high as \$50 billion annually, and we offload our financial responsibilities to States and let them be on their own.

The evidence is clear. It does not take into account inflation and other changes in discretionary spending over the next decade.

I ask my colleagues to recall recent history. In the 1980s and in the 1990s, President Reagan, a former State Governor, understood the necessity of a bipartisan effort to protect the States. President Clinton, another State Governor, codified that recognition of States by signing the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act in which the Congress pledged to no longer continue this practice of passing laws and then telling the States it is your job to figure out how to pay for it.

But this White House, also currently occupied by another former State Governor and many of my colleagues who serve in Congress, over half who come from State legislatures, I believe, have forgotten where they come from.

Do you think we are solving problems when we are just passing them on to our States? I will continue to question the sincerity of those who lead this budget effort to actually achieve responsible fiscal management. The most recent example of that reluctance to embrace sound fiscal management principles was demonstrated last week in the Budget Committee's rejection of an amendment that would reinstitute pay-as-you-go, which my colleagues, Mr. ROSS and Mr. CARDOZA, have spoken to. Pay-as-you-go is a concept that all of our households employ, which means in your family's budget, you do not spend money that you do not have.

As Members may recall, PAYGO was agreed to in the 1990s by then-Speaker Newt Gingrich and signed into law by President Clinton. In the mid-1990s, that led to the first budget surpluses we had in over 40 years. Ladies and gentlemen, let me remind you, over the last 5 years, we have gone from surpluses to massive deficits.

I remember as a young kid watching television on "Dragnet." Remember Sergeant Friday? He used to say "Just the facts, ma'am." These are the facts, and I think Americans are coming to realize these facts do not hold up to the principles of sound fiscal management. We can do better. We should do better. Americans deserve it.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. COSTA for joining us this evening to discuss these issues that are so important to not only today's generation but to our children and grandchildren.

This week on the floor of the House there is going to be a very close vote. Most votes on the House floor last somewhere between 5 and 15 minutes. Every once in a while we have a vote that goes for an hour or 2 hours, sometimes even 3 hours, while enough arms are twisted to be able to get enough votes for a vote to pass.

I have always said the Prescott Curly Wolves, they have some pretty good

years in football. And when there is no time left on the clock, if we are not ahead, if we could just not sound the buzzer until we are ahead, we would be the State champions every year. That is, unfortunately, how many votes run on this House floor. When they are close votes, votes are no longer 5 or 15 minutes; they last until the Republican leadership prevails; and then the horn, the bell, the gavel is sounded. That will likely happen late Thursday night or early Friday morning during the vote on this budget because this budget does not reflect America's priorities, and they are going to have a very difficult time passing it.

In fact, I predict it will be on a strict party-line vote, and they will lose some votes. It is unbelievable the fiscal turnaround from a budget surplus in fiscal year 2001 to the five largest deficits in history, and they have occurred in the last 5 consecutive years with the 2006 deficit being \$372 billion. And the projected deficit for fiscal year 2007 is \$348 billion; but not really. That is counting the money that the politicians are borrowing from the Social Security trust fund.

If you do not count the money that is being borrowed from the Social Security trust fund, the deficit last year was really \$605 billion and for fiscal year 2007, it is \$448 billion. I am beginning to understand why the Republican leadership refused to give me a hearing or a vote on the first vote I filed as a Member of Congress, a bill to tell the politicians in Washington to keep their hands off the Social Security trust fund.

When this administration took office, it inherited a projected 10-year surplus of \$5.6 trillion. This surplus has become a \$3.3 trillion deficit, an embarrassing reversal of \$8.9 trillion.

Since 2001, there have been four increases in the debt ceiling to a staggering total of \$3 trillion. This Republican-proposed budget increases the statutory debt ceiling by another \$2.3 trillion, almost doubling the debt ceiling in 5 years to \$11.3 trillion. And if that is not enough, with regards to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, this budget only includes \$50 billion, less than half of what was appropriated for 2006, and goes so far as to actually assume we will be out of Iraq and Afghanistan after 2007. This is not a truthful budget. The budget includes no funding, absolutely no funding for the war efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan beyond 2007.

This Republican Congress is telling us in this budget that the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan will be over by the end of fiscal year 2007. We know better. This is not a truthful budget.

The budget resolution calls for \$39 billion in 2007 and \$228 billion in new tax cuts over the next 5 years; \$39 billion in tax cuts in 2007, \$228 billion in new tax cuts over the next 5 years, and \$1.7 trillion in new tax cuts over the next 10 years that primarily benefit only those earning over \$400,000 a year.

And in times of deficit, in times when we are borrowing a billion a day, what does that mean? That means we are borrowing money from places like China. This administration has borrowed more money from foreigners in the past 5 years than the previous 42 Presidents combined. Let me repeat that: this administration has borrowed more money from foreign central banks and foreign investors in the past 5 years than the previous 42 Presidents combined; and yet we are now going to borrow more money from China and Hong Kong and, God forbid, OPEC nations, to give a tax cut to those earning over \$400,000 a year.

Over 5 years, the Republican-proposed resolution cuts nondefense discretionary spending by \$162 billion, below the amount simply needed to maintain services at current levels.

Our next speaker will talk more about these funding cuts, these cuts that not only cut programs that matter to people but undercut our values, that undercut America's priorities.

□ 2100

And to talk more about this is the gentleman from Oklahoma, who has quickly become a real leader and a real voice within the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition, my friend, DAN BOREN.

Mr. BOREN. Thank you, Congressman ROSS. Mr. Speaker, you know it is not very often that I come to this floor to speak on an issue. As a freshman Member, sometimes we don't come down and talk about issues on this floor. But I think it is very important tonight that we talk about this budget because budgets are a statement of our priorities.

I am going to talk tonight a little bit about rural America. I also want to talk a little bit about our Nation's veterans.

For those of you all who have never been to Oklahoma, I am going to tell you a little bit about my district. My district is in eastern Oklahoma. I represent 25 counties of a very rural part of the United States. The largest community in my district is Muskogee, Oklahoma, population 38,000 people, where my wife, Andrea, and I reside.

There are towns like Broken Bow and Idabel and Miami and Sallisaw, Wapanucka, Bromide, Bluejacket, some of the best people in the world. And let me tell you, this budget does not help my folks back home. I think it is very important that we reduce the national debt and we balance our budget, but we can't do it on the backs of rural America.

Once again, this year the President's budget slashes rural development programs. It freezes funding for rural education and phases out our rural health care grants.

In my district, it abolishes the COPS grant program which is responsible for putting over 200 officers on the street in eastern Oklahoma. We have a real meth problem in eastern Oklahoma.

We have a terrible meth problem. We had a lot of meth labs that were popping up and actually we are doing a lot about that. But we need more cops on the street. This budget cuts 200 police officers.

My good friend, my colleague from Arkansas, Mr. ROSS, mentioned cuts in our ag research centers. Folks, 2 weeks ago I was in Lane, Oklahoma. There is a research center, the Wes Watkins Lane Ag Research Center, employs a lot of folks in my district, has a \$3 million impact on the local economy. We are talking about salaries, 70, \$80,000 salaries. These are big salaries in my district. In the President's budget that facility is set to close. And I know I am going to be working with my colleague from Arkansas to help stop that.

Here is another couple of statistics. It cuts assistance to rural manufacturers and small businesses by nearly 60 percent. In the State of Oklahoma we lost over 80,000 manufacturing jobs over the past 2 years. And we are talking about taking those investments away from small businesses. We need help in rural Oklahoma.

It also cuts rural health care by 83 percent, and not just in rural America, not just in rural Oklahoma. It also affects all of our veterans. I have got a big Veterans Hospital in my district in Muskogee, Oklahoma. And I get a chance to visit with our veterans all the time. And they talk to me about the TRICARE program.

One example in this budget is an increase in co-pays and enrollment fees for military retirees in the TRICARE program. So this country is saying to you, you go, you enlist in the service, you spend 20 years supporting the flag, going overseas, fighting for our freedoms, and we are going to cut your benefits. That is a wrong priority, and we won't stand for it.

Another thing we have got to think about when we are talking about cutting these programs like TRICARE. Folks, we are facing a recruitment problem right now. We are trying to get more and more young people to join the military. How can we tell those young people to join the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines, how can we tell them to join when we are going to cut their benefits? There is a direct correlation to what we are doing in this budget to our Nation's Armed Forces.

And I stand as a Blue Dog, someone that believes in fiscal accountability. But, at the same time, we have got to make sure that we defend those priorities. And I stand with my colleague from Arkansas. I know we are going to have a few other speakers here in a minute. And with that I am going to yield back to my colleague from Arkansas. And I thank him for allowing me to be a part of this program.

As I mentioned before, I came down as part of the 30-something and gave a few talks, and I rarely come down. But this budget got me so upset, thinking about the people back home in Okla-

homa, that I wanted to come to this floor and talk about these priorities. And with that I yield back to my friend, Congressman Ross.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman from Oklahoma for being a part of this special order on the budget, the debt and the deficit. And I appreciate the work he is doing with me to try and save all these agricultural research centers from closure that are so important, not only to rural America and to the communities where they are located like Booneville, Arkansas, but also so important to our farm families, all over this great country.

Mr. Speaker, if you have any comments, questions for the Blue Dog Coalition, there are 37 of us. We are a group of fiscally conservative Democrats that come together here on Capitol Hill to try and restore some common sense and fiscal discipline to our Nation's government. And Mr. Speaker, if you have any comments or concerns of our group, I would encourage you to e-mail us at bluedog@mail.house.gov. That is bluedog@mail.house.gov.

At this time I am pleased to turn this over to MELISSA BEAN, Congresswoman from Illinois, a member of the Blue Dog Coalition, who many Tuesday evenings comes down and joins us for this, what I believe is a very healthy debate and healthy discussion about how we need to get our Nation's fiscal house in order and restore some of the conservative values that many of us were raised on and still believe in. And with that I yield.

And we are also joined tonight by, as we are almost every Tuesday night, and I am so proud of that, DAVID SCOTT, Congressman from Georgia, a real leader, a real voice for common sense and conservative values within the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition. And I welcome both of you. And we can have a colloquy or do whatever y'all want to do. I will yield right now to the gentlewoman from Illinois.

Ms. BEAN. I am honored to join my colleagues in the Blue Dog Coalition and, again, want to commend your leadership, Congressman ROSS, of our Blue Dog Coalition, because fiscal responsibility has to be our top priority in this Congress.

So many of us came to this body to address issues of importance and priority to the families in the districts that we represent. And yet, if we don't, first and foremost, act responsibly with the national tax dollars that we have, we can't properly address those regional priorities that we would like to.

I was here on the floor with you just several weeks ago, and I mentioned that I had been with some seventh graders in my district. One of the fun parts of our job is when we can go have civics classes with the kids. And they were pretty mortified just a few weeks ago when I shared with them that their share of our national debt, each individual one of them, was \$27,000. And I am sad to see from your last chart, you

have now moved it, it is already up to \$28,000. So we went from \$8.2 trillion to \$8.3 trillion in just a couple of weeks. And it is frightening how rampant this irresponsible spending has been and how out of control our Congress has been.

And it is sad that when I spoke to these seventh graders about their family budgets or their parents who worked in the business communities, how did they avoid getting themselves into debt, that those seventh graders could better articulate fiscal common sense by saying, don't spend what you don't have, than this Congress has been able to demonstrate.

And I also serve on a caucus that addresses financial literacy for young people in this country. And it is so hypocritical that we want to talk to these kids about how to better manage their money when we are not doing a good job with our Nation's resources.

Mr. ROSS. The gentlewoman is so right, and I appreciate her sharing her experiences.

I was at Pine Bluff High School on Monday, speaking to a couple of classes, history classes, and that is one of the things we talked about was the debt, the deficit and what it means to their generation, because, you know, it is what I call the debt tax. It is one tax that, debt as in D-E-B-T, not to be confused with the death tax. It is what in the Blue Dog Coalition we have coined as the debt tax, because as long as we have got a debt, as long as we are spending a half a billion a day paying interest on the debt, then that is a half a billion we don't have to meet America's priorities. And that debt tax has got to be paid back by future generations, our children and grandchildren, because I can assure you all these foreign investors and foreign central banks that are now funding our deficit, they are not going to forgive our debt the way that oftentimes in the past we have forgiven others debts.

And I yield to the gentleman from Georgia. Glad to have you with us this evening, Mr. SCOTT.

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Always a pleasure to be with you, Mr. ROSS, and with you, Ms. BEAN. It is always a pleasure.

You were talking about the young kids, and you have got to think about those young kids. You have got to think about the generations coming behind us. Some of those are watching C-SPAN tonight as we speak, and hopefully all across America they are beginning to pay attention to what is happening here on the floor of this Congress.

And as I stand here, I am reminded of what happened on the floor of a Congress and a Senate a few centuries back and is captured really greatly in a play by the great William Shakespeare. William Shakespeare wrote a brilliant play called Julius Caesar. And in that play, a very important part was as Caesar was on the floor as the senators were surrounding him and knives going

into him, he looked out at all of the senators and saw them, Cicero and Cassius, and then he leaned over and he looked over caught the eye of Brutus and grabbed him as Brutus stuck the knife into his ribs. And he said "Et tu, Brutus. Yours is the meanest cut of all."

Well, I am here to tell you and tell America, Mr. Speaker, Mr. ROSS, Ms. BEAN, that the meanest cut of all in this budget is the cut to those law enforcement folks, those people that are on the front lines at home, who have our security in their hands, our police officers, our firemen, our first responders and the military, our veterans, our Air Force, our Navy, our Marines, who are being cut unmercifully, Brutus-like, in this budget.

I just want to highlight for the American people so they can actually see and hear how this budget is devastating those that we place our security in their hands. Just think that this budget includes a cut in the funding of first responders by 25 percent at a time when we are in such great need.

Police Departments nationwide do not have the protective gear to safely secure a site after a detonation of a weapon of mass destruction in this country. Fire Departments have only enough radios for half the firefighters on a shift.

And yet, this budget, this Republican budget that they are asking us to vote on in the next day or two, includes a cut in first responder funding within the Department of Homeland Security of \$573 million, 25 percent. And within this total, the budget slashes the Firefighters Grant Program by \$355 million and eliminates all funding for the law enforcement terrorism prevention, reduction of \$385 million.

When we look at our veterans, we are treating them so badly under this budget. It increases the health care costs for one million veterans.

America, we need to pay attention to what this Republican budget is doing. For the fourth year in a row, the budget raises health care costs for 1 million veterans by imposing new fees on veterans, costing them more than \$2.6 billion over 5 years and driving at least 200 veterans out of the system.

It doubles the copayment for prescription drugs from \$8 to \$15, America, and imposes an enrollment fee of \$250 a year for Category 7 and 8 veterans who make as little as \$26,000 a year.

This is the truth. This is what they are asking us to vote on. And I pray and I hope that we will have enough Republicans to stand with us Democrats and reject this as not in the best interest of the American people.

It fails to address the strain on our troops. Now, Mr. ROSS, I have been over to Iraq, just came back in January; went over to Afghanistan. I have been in the hot spots. I have seen our military, and they are doing a fantastic job in extraordinary circumstances. We are talking about 19- and 20- and 21-year-old kids out there handling extraordinary pressures.

□ 2115

And I will tell you an experience that I had that I will never forget. When I was in Iraq, I went into Camp Victory, standing in the middle of Camp Victory, and I met and was hugged by a soldier. And both of us in the middle of Camp Victory hugging, tears coming down my eyes and down his, and he says to me, "Congressman SCOTT, when I am hugging you, it's like I am hugging a piece of home."

I vowed in Iraq on that spot that night, having dinner with those soldiers in Iraq, that I would fight tooth and nail on this floor to treat our veterans and to treat our military right.

And, Mr. ROSS, as I told it to you, what is in this budget, it refuses to end the disabled veterans tax. This Republican budget fails to repeal the veterans tax, which forces disabled military retirees to give up \$1 of their pension for every dollar of disability pay they receive. Added to that it fails to end the military family tax, the survivor benefit plan, penalizes survivors, mostly widows, of those soldiers who are killed as a result of combat. That is what this budget does. That is why I say that the meanest cut in this budget is to our military, to our veterans, to our law enforcement people who put their lives on the line for little or no pay. And the only reason to do it is to offset this tax cut for the 1 percent wealthiest people in this country and then have to go borrow the money to pay for that at the sacrifice of our first responders.

This is why I am praying with every ounce of strength in me that this body will stand up to this Republican budget and vote it down because it is not in the best interests of our Nation's security, our national security, or our homeland security.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. SCOTT) for his input and would encourage him to stay for what I hope will be a meaningful discussion with the time remaining this evening as we talk about the budget and the debt and deficit. And I want to thank the gentlewoman from Illinois (Ms. BEAN) for staying with us as well.

Some of this has been mentioned tonight; some has not. But let us just take a look at some of the cuts that will be included in the budget this week. Education, the Republican budget resolution that will be voted on on the floor of this Chamber this week is identical to the administration's proposed budget cuts to education, training, and social services, including \$2.2 billion in cuts to the Department of Education.

Let us begin by putting this thing in perspective. We spend more money paying interest on the national debt in 100 days than we spend funding education in 365 days. What does that say about our commitment to our children?

Ms. BEAN. To future generations.

Mr. ROSS. To future generations. And yet they propose to cut \$2.2 billion

from the Department of Education. The President's budget fully eliminates, fully eliminates, 41 Department of Education programs.

I had folks in my office this week, today, from my district. They are involved in the HIPPI program, programs that are helping young people get ready for kindergarten. They reach those young people at ages 3, 4, and 5. And they also go into the homes and teach the parents how to teach the children. It is a wonderful program.

And I had a meeting yesterday in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, with the chancellor at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, which is an historically black college, Chancellor Lawrence Davis, and he was telling me that we have a crisis in America with African American males because 60 percent of African American males who do not finish high school end up in prison. And his concern and my concern is that America does not seem to be nearly as alarmed about it as they should be. The way we address this is by investing in education. If we will get to these young people at age 3, 4, and 5, we can spend pennies on the dollar compared to what we are spending warehousing them in their adult life in prison. It is about priorities.

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. ROSS. I yield to the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Excellent point. And there is no greater emergency in this country than addressing the plight of African American males. No group in this country has paid the price, has made the contributions, has gone through the struggles, and has faced the vicissitudes of racism as the African American community. Structure, discipline, sanctioned by law. And yet if there was just one tenth of the effort to correct that imbalance, but on every score, you go down the line, and you mentioned them, education, the college grant. They say No Child Left Behind. An excellent idea but underfunded by 3 or \$400 billion, not putting the money in. Black college Presidents have come up to this Congress hat in hand, begging, pleading for money for scholarships, and have not gotten a response.

In this budget itself, do you know that the fastest growing part of this budget is the interest we are paying? And the interest we are paying is more than all that we are spending totally on primary education, secondary education, college education, everything education, as well as the environment and veterans. This is dastardly wrong.

Mr. ROSS. The gentleman is so right. And I was sitting there in a meeting in my office today listening to a group pleading with me to vote against this budget, which I am, pleading with me to vote against this budget because it cuts programs that give 3- and 4-year-olds a fighting chance to be ready when they enter kindergarten that can help us be able to give them a chance at success in life.

We live in a free country. We get to choose what we eat and where we worship and whom we marry. Some people do that several times. And one of the few things in life we do not get to choose is who our parents are. Some children, both black and white, get really lucky. Some do not. And I think as a Nation we have a duty and obligation to be there for all young people. And if we can get to these young people at age 3 and 4 and get them ready for kindergarten, then we can have an impact on their lives and turn them into a productive citizen instead of spending \$20,000 a year paying for them to sit idly and wastefully behind bars.

Yet these programs, these preschool programs, are being cut in this budget. And one of the women that was in my office today talking to me about it, she said, I was one of those in one of these programs. They came to my home and they taught me how to teach my child, and I started teaching my child, and my child started making the honor roll. And this woman today, she is from my district, she said, Mike, I want you to know I am now going back to college to become a school teacher. She went and got her high school degree. She is now going to college to become a school teacher because of one of these programs that not only has had an impact on her daughter's life but has now had an impact on her life. Yet these programs are either cut or eliminated in this year's budget.

Ms. BEAN. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. ROSS. I yield to the gentleman from Illinois.

Ms. BEAN. So much of what we have been talking about, whether it is education, whether it is the environment, it is all about future generations and our commitment to them.

And to go back to the seventh graders that I mentioned that I spoke with, they are all studying the Constitution right now. Some of them probably in your districts as well as mine are taking their Constitution tests. I was so impressed with their knowledge and their youthful idealism as we talked about the Constitution and what it meant to them.

And we had an open discussion, and we took the preamble of the Constitution apart, and we talked about what does it mean in order to form a more perfect union. And they understood that that meant that we have a commitment to make our country better. We talked about providing for the common defense. And they understood that that meant not just national defense but also protecting Americans from natural disaster like we have experienced in the gulf region and then, sadly, just this week from the tornadoes. They talked about establish justice and what did justice mean. And they understood that that meant there should be basic fairness in our laws.

But the part that really resonated with the kids was when we talked about that as we preserve these liberties and these American values, we

do them for ourselves and our posterity. And they understood that that meant we as adults should be making decisions not only for them as well as ourselves but for their children. And so they are very concerned that we are not making the right decisions. So they expressed a lot of those issues. And to go back to the fiscal responsibility theme that we have been talking about tonight, they were able to understand the analogy of what we have been doing with this debt, and driving ourselves into debt essentially would be if I got a credit card and went out on a spending spree, but I put the credit card in my daughters' names and said to them, When you are 18 and you get a job, you get to pay it off. And that is what we are doing to these kids, and that is not justice. That is not making good decisions for our posterity. We can do a better job than we have been doing for them.

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. The American people are expecting us to.

I just share with you my own experience. Every weekend I get home, by the time I get off the airplane, I get in my tee-shirt and my jeans and I get out and walk door to door in my district, about 50 percent of which is new out in Cobb and Douglas Counties. And there is a certain experience that you get when you go knock on doors and you talk to your constituents and they say, Oh, the Congressman is here. And, Mr. ROSS, let me tell you America is worried. The people in America are worried about the direction of this country.

At one stop a lady comes out and she says, Yes, put a yard sign in, and I give her a tee-shirt. And she says, Congressman SCOTT, what are we going to do about our education? I am not just talking about the money, but I am talking about the fact that my kid is sitting in a hallway because there is no room, there is no classroom. And in many of our counties across this country, they are meeting in trailers because we have not put the money in the budget in order to deal with it.

Now, I got the latest figures because I think it is very important that the American people know why we must vote down this budget come tomorrow or Thursday. The budget provides \$15.4 million less, a cut in funding for education, than promised by the No Child Left Behind. No Child Left Behind. No Child Left Behind, but we are leaving them behind and not only leaving them behind but we are leaving them on the floor, in the hallways to study, overcrowded classrooms, teachers without adequate pay to do all the paperwork and not paying them for it. They are meeting in fire stations. They are meeting down the road in an old church basement. They are meeting in trailers. Damp, unsafe, unsanitary trailers. This is what this budget is doing to our American children.

Under this Republican budget, the cumulative funding shortfall for No Child Left Behind is \$55 billion. This Republican budget, as we talked about

before about the need, especially in some of our hard cases, this Republican budget completely eliminates several important education programs, including vocational education State grants, educational technology State grants. We are talking about those institutions that are actually taking our youngsters and training them with jobs that are being cut. Americans are worried about that.

Veterans are worried. Down the street another one says he is standing in line, not being able to get his treatment at a VA hospital. We are calling and he says if it was not for this congressional office calling, what would happen? But there are literally thousands of Americans out there, veterans, who are facing these dilemmas every single day. And they are upset about these unwise, foolish, mean, and unnecessary cuts to vital programs not because we cannot afford it, not because we are not wise to do it, but we are doing it just to offset costs for a tax cut for the wealthiest 1 percent in this country.

□ 2130

Even them, even Bill Gates and others at that level, are saying, "We don't need it." But our veterans need it. Our teachers need it. Our children who are in these trailers, they need it.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I know I feel confident that the Republican leadership will send down a group to follow us. They do that every Tuesday evening. I am honored that they feel a need to do that. I think our message is getting through about trying to restore fiscal discipline and common sense to our Nation's government.

They are going to talk about how we didn't vote for this so-called Deficit Reduction Act. What they are not going to tell you was it was \$40 billion to cuts in Medicaid, student loans and the orphan program, and also it was followed by \$90 billion in tax cuts for those earning over \$400,000 a year.

I wasn't real good in math back in high school or college, but \$90 billion in new tax cuts and \$40 billion in cuts to the poorest among us equals what, \$50 billion of new debt. Only in Washington would they call that the Deficit Reduction Act. That was the name of it.

Then they are going to say this budget we are opposing is making the hard choices and the hard cuts and eliminating important programs in the name of trying to restore some fiscal discipline and balance the budget. What they fail to tell you is it is really about priorities, because their budget includes \$1.7 trillion in new tax cuts over 10 years.

Look, I voted for the biggest tax cut in 20 years back in 2001, and a lot of my Democratic colleagues are still mad at me about it. We had a surplus, it was before 9/11, before Iraq and before Afghanistan. We really were giving people some of their money back.

Yet now, every time since then that we have passed a tax cut, because we

no longer have a surplus, we have a deficit, every tax cut we have passed since that time has been funded with money that we are borrowing from places like China.

In 2000, we had borrowed a total of \$62 billion from China. From 1976 up until 2000 we owed \$62 billion to China, and at the end of 2005 we owed \$257 billion to China. Japan, \$668.3 billion. Our government, we are borrowing \$1 billion a day and spending half a billion a day paying interest on the debt we have already got. That is half a billion that can't go to fund our agricultural research centers or build I-49 or I-69 or many other opportunities and priorities and needs we have in Arkansas' Fourth Congressional District, because our Nation is in debt and running record deficits and borrowing money from all these foreign investors and foreign central banks.

Put it this way: Foreign lenders currently hold a total \$2.174 trillion of our public debt. Compare that to only \$23 billion in foreign holdings back in 1993.

Here is the top 10 list. Here is who is funding your tax cuts. Here is who is funding our government. We have borrowed \$668.3 billion from Japan; we owe now \$262.6 billion, and it goes up every week, to China; the United Kingdom, \$244.8 billion, Caribbean banking centers, have you ever heard of that? I never heard of a Caribbean banking center before, but we have borrowed \$97.9 billion from them; Taiwan, \$71.6 billion; OPEC, you wonder why gas is \$2.50 a gallon? We have now borrowed \$77.6 billion from OPEC; Korea, \$68.3 billion; Germany, \$65.2 billion; Canada, \$54.9 billion; and Hong Kong, \$48.3 billion. Those are the top 10 countries that we are borrowing money from to help fund tax cuts in our country to pay for tax cuts for those earning over \$400,000 a year.

I yield to the gentleman from Georgia.

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. And here is the danger. Here is the danger when you put your financial security in the hands of foreign nations at the rate that we are doing it. Now we have to worry that some of these nations could very well sell their U.S. dollars in their reserves and then they could switch their currency into other nations. They could do a lot of things when they have our debt.

What happens if they lose patience here? By having so much of our debt in the hands of foreign interests, we place our whole financial security in great peril.

China now has \$250 billion of our debt, Japan has \$687 billion of our debt, Taiwan has \$117 billion of our debt and Hong Kong has \$67 billion of our debt. I mention these because these are countries in the Asian Basin. If collectively they came together, for surely geography puts their direct interests more at stake than it does us over here in the Western Hemisphere, if they came together with a pact and just made a decision on what to do with our

debt or whether they are going to sell U.S. dollars or reinvest in other countries or do things that will drive down our financial security, look at the bad position that places us in. And when you combine that with the fact that India and China have taken over our manufacturing capabilities, it shows the seriousness of the situation.

Mr. ROSS. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I thank the gentleman from Georgia and the gentlewoman from Illinois for joining me this evening.

At the beginning of this special order, this was the national debt, \$8,378,143,406,405 and some change. Just in the hour that we have spent here on the floor in this special order discussing the Nation's debt and the deficit, the debt has gone up approximately \$41,666,000. So the new number is \$8,378,185,072,405 and some change. Just in the hour we have been here, we have seen the national debt go up that much, \$41,666,000, approximately.

So, until our government gets its fiscal house in order, as Members of the fiscally conservative Blue Dog Coalition, we are going to continue to come this to this floor every Tuesday night and talk about restoring some common sense and fiscal discipline to our Nation's government. We will be talking more about the Blue Dog 12 point plan for curing our Nation's addiction to deficit spending and will be talking about our plan, our vision for a better America, a vision that includes a balanced budget and so many other provisions that just make good old-fashioned sense.

THE FALL OF GREAT NATIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. REICHERT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, in 2003, I was privileged to hear British Prime Minister Tony Blair speak in this Chamber, and one comment he made that particularly caught my attention was this: He said, "As Britain knows, all predominant power seems for a time invincible, but in fact it is transient."

What he was referring to, I believe, was that all great nations, when things are going well, assume that they are going to go on forever. But history shows us with example after example that this is really fallacious reasoning. So we might examine three such instances.

First of all, going clear back to Rome, which ruled nearly the entire civilized world 2,000 years ago, Rome appeared to be invincible, but eventually it fell. The reasons given generally by historians are these: There was a general decline in morality; there was an increasing corruption and instability in leadership; an increasing public addiction to every more violent public spectacles; an increase in crime and prostitution; and a population that

became more self-absorbed, apathetic and unwilling to sacrifice for the common good.

Secondly, we might look at Great Britain itself. Certainly Great Britain has not fallen from preeminence, but it certainly is not the power it once was during the 1600s up through much of the 1800s, when it really dominated the entire world.

□ 2140

That empire slowly crumbled, and the reasons given again by historians were these: It lost the national resolve to maintain its territory, values that led to its ascendancy were eroded, and spiritual underpinnings shifted dramatically.

Thirdly, we might just take a look quickly at a more recent superpower, Russia, which was one of two great superpowers as recently as 20 years ago. In a matter of months Russia disintegrated before our very eyes, and I think I along with many other people were amazed at how quickly this happened. Alexander Solzhenitzyn reflected on this fall when he observed this. He said, "Over a half century ago when I was still a child, I recall a number of older people offering the following explanation for the great disasters that had befallen Russia," and he quotes, "Men have forgotten God. That is why all of this has happened." Marx and Lenin had dismantled Russia's religious heritage and values, and Russia's foundation was broken and it collapsed like a house of cards with nothing to sustain it.

There are some common themes in all of these historic national collapses. First of all, the citizens became less willing to sacrifice for others and for their country; citizens became more self-absorbed, had a greater desire for the state to provide instead of providing for themselves; a weakening of commonly held values, and a decline of spiritual commitment.

You may say, well, what does all of this have to do with the United States, and why are you talking about this this evening? We obviously have the most powerful military, the strongest economy, the most stable government of any nation in the world today.

It is very easy to think that we are invincible and that this may last forever. But as Tony Blair stated so clearly, as Britain knows, all predominant power for a time seems invincible, but in fact it is truly transient.

This statement of Prime Minister Blair's rang a bell with me as I sat and listened to him, because over 36 years of coaching and working with young people I witnessed some trends that were concerning to me. The young men that I worked with were more talented physically and more gifted each year, yet they showed more signs of stress, more personal struggles, less moral clarity as time passed.

This chart illustrates some of the difficulty that we are currently experiencing with some of our young people